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INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUMIAAA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL//J2/J3/J5// PRIORITY  
RHBVJFX/COMPHIBRON SIX PRIORITY  
RHBPCOM/USNS COMFORT PRIORITY  
RHBPCOM/MEDTRE FAC COMFORT PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAGUA 000415

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CEN KRAAIMOORE  
DEPT FOR WHA/CEN, INR/IAA  
DEPT FOR DRL MAGGIO  
DEPT FOR PRM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [NU](#)

SUBJECT: NICARAGUA: MISKITO ELDERS DECLARE "INDEPENDENCE," ELECT NEW LEADERS

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Richard M. Sanders for reasons 1 .4 (b & d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Miskito Council of Elders elected Reverend Hector Williams Padilla as a new "Wihta Tara" (Miskito for "Grand Judge") to be

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THREE DAY CONVENTION OF ANCIENTS - RETURN OF THE JUDGE  
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[1](#)2. (C) At the end of a three-day convention held in a gymnasium and convoked by the Miskito Council of Elders in Bilwi, over 1,000 attendees elected a new "Wihta Tara" (Miskito for "Grand Judge") to be the leader of an independent Mosquito Coast and to champion indigenous issues, neglected by current leaders. (NOTE: The Mosquito Coast is a coastal region of Nicaragua and Honduras that comprises a band of lowlands approximately 40 miles wide that skirts the Caribbean Sea for about 225 miles. Even though Columbus visited the area in 1502, Europeans had little contact with the area until the 17th Century, when buccaneers convinced the England to establish a protectorate over the Miskito Indians. The British claim was disputed by Spain, Nicaragua and the United States until the matter was finally settled by the occupation of the Mosquito Coast by the Nicaraguan government and by the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850 between Great Britain and the United States. END NOTE)

[1](#)3. (C) The Council of Elders is a group of indigenous leaders, primarily of Miskito descent, that regulates, among other things, the indigenous lands of Puerto Cabezas. The Council is recognized as an independent indigenous organization with the moral authority to convoke a national assembly. During the convention, Miskito and indigenous leaders were given opportunities to address the attendees. Among the invitees were important Miskito leaders such as Osorno "Commandante Blas" Coleman, Brooklyn Rivera, and Steadman Fagoth (see RefTel) - of these, only Coleman, a strong opponent of the Sandinistas, attended and addressed the crowd on Saturday. On Sunday, April 19, the convention ended with the election of Reverend Hector Williams Padilla as the new Wihta Tara, along with Stedy Alvarado, as the Minor Judge, and the Reverend Jimmy Webster, as Minister Counselor. According to our contacts, the last time a Wihta Tara led the Mosquito Coast was in 1894, prior a U.S.-led occupation of Bluefields that ultimately re-acknowledged the sovereignty of Nicaragua over its Atlantic Coast and incorporated the territory into the Zelaya department of Nicaragua.

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THREE DECREES - INDEPENDENCE, NO ELECTIONS, NEW CURRENCY  
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[1](#)4. (C) Immediately following his election, the new Wihta Tara read a decree that proclaimed the immediate independence of the Mosquito Coast f

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CHALLENGE TO BROOKLYN RIVERA  
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[1](#)5. (C) Since the 1970's Brooklyn Rivera has claimed to be the main leader of the Miskito people. In 1979, Rivera and Steadman Fagoth (now GON Fisheries Minister) were elected leaders of an indigenous organization and later became some of the leaders of the armed resistance against the Sandinistas following the Red Christmas Massacre. In 1985-86, YATAMA was formed and Rivera was again elected as one of its leaders. From the time of its creation YATAMA was an independent indigenous organization; however, it became political party in 1995-96. When Rivera formed an unpopular political alliance with the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) to increase YATAMA control in the regional government (see RefTel), the party's indigenous base has increasingly distanced itself from its leader. Our contacts believe that having an independent Wihta Tara directly challenges Rivera's claims to represent all of the Miskito people, and shows that he only represents YATAMA's (or his own personal) interests. When interviewed by the press, Rivera said that the Wihta Tara election does not reflect the sentiment of all of the Miskito communities, but rather the Bilwi neighborhoods and the leadership of Oscar Hodgson, the legal advisor to the Council of Elders. Moreover, Rivera told reporters that independence is not gained by public decrees but only at the cost of blood.

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COMMENT  
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[1](#)6. (C) The Council of Elders' legal advisor, Oscar Hodgson, hinted at an independence declaration to Emboff during previous meetings and told us that they were exploring ways to get international courts to annul treaties from the 19th Century. The election of a new Wihta Tara, after more than a century is significant, and demonstrates the frustration that

many Miskito people have with their self-proclaimed leader, Brooklyn Rivera, who has formed an alliance with the FSLN. The independence declaration by the new Wihta Tara is not likely to prosper. Indigenous leader Coleman told the assembled attendees that while he supports their goals, they were not ready to declare independence because they need financial support, international support, and more importantly, the full support of the people established through a referendum process. It is inconceivable to us that the GON would accept this claim of independence. We will watch closely to see if the proclamation has any echo in the Atlantic Coast public and if so, what steps the GON would take to oppose any secession efforts.

CALLAHAN